



SUMMER UPDATE

Appleby Archaeology Group

May 1999

Thank you everyone for the membership subscriptions which are essential for funding the groups activities, talks and newsletter. We are also grateful to the number of people who have given their time and energy to the group (including several of our speakers) free of charge.

NEWS

This edition of the Update includes two reports by Phyllis Rouston on recent meetings. Phyllis, who is the group secretary, is doing an excellent job keeping members (and the public) informed about our events. Thanks also to Georgina Plowright for publicity. We have had good coverage recently both in the Cumberland and Westmorland Herald and the Westmorland Messenger, and our first mention on Radio Cumbria!

In order to inform a wider audience of our activities work will start shortly on our own Web pages. This will initially provide information about our events, access to reports on meetings, local research and links to other amateur archaeology pages and sources of local history. Further details will be included in future editions of the Update.

Thanks go to Harry Hawkins for an immensely enjoyable afternoon exploring the landscape around Shap Abbey. We had a record turnout for an outdoor event (24 in all) and the weather fortunately stayed fine. Harry gave us a detailed introduction to the history of the abbey followed by a tour of the abbey lands. All were intrigued by his keen observations of the landscape, field boundaries and archaeological remains, which helped to set the abbey ruins in their proper context.

Indoor meetings will begin again in September. It has proved increasingly difficult to find speakers for the summer months as most archaeologists are out digging during the good weather. Therefore the group will be concentrating on outdoor activities during June, July and August. This will also allow us to concentrate on organizing our own research during this period (see the back page).

Martin Railton

DIARY

Bronze Age in Britain Exhibition

This panel exhibition is at Kendal Museum until the 12th June and is well worth a visit. It covers several topics of recent research on the Bronze Age in Britain including: settlement, ritual monuments, copper mining, farming, trade and artefacts. Tel. 01539 721374

Feeding the Pharaohs 2.00pm Tue May 18th

Also at Kendal museum is a talk on agriculture in Ancient Egypt given by Victor Blunden of Manchester University. Ring to book a place.

The Romans at Ambleside 26 March-26 July

Artefacts from the fort and settlement at Galava are currently on display at the Armitage Ambleside Museum along with drawings, maps and models of the fort. Ring 015394 31212 for details

National Archaeology Days 24/25 July 99

Brookdale National Park Centre is the venue for a weekend of walks, talks and activities celebrating National Archaeology days. Tel. 01539 446601

Archaeology GCSE For Adults

There is to be evening class in archaeology at the Appleby Grammar School beginning in September. It aims to provide an introduction to archaeology for the amateur and explores the remains of the past from all periods (Students can also gain a GCSE in archaeology from this course). Ring the Adult Education Office on 017683 53289 for details.

Demystifying Field Archaeology Conference

The Council for Independent (or Amateur) Archaeology is organizing a conference in Sheffield on 11th and 12th September for those groups interested in organizing field work and carrying out projects. More details are available from Martin or alternatively contact Neil Falkner on 0181 671 5363

HUNTERS AND GATHERERS

Cumbria's Earliest Inhabitants?

On February 2nd the group enjoyed a talk from Andrew Pierce on Prehistoric Hunters and Gatherers.

He started by outlining what Britain would have been like around 9000-4000BC, the Mesolithic period. Fascinating maps showed present thinking on the changing sea levels and coastlines in north west Europe from the last Ice Age to 5000BC. It is possible that the Channel land bridge between Europe and Britain remained much later than 6000BC and with it islands in the Channel for example Dogger Island.

The climate became warmer as the ice retreated reaching an optimum, some degrees higher than today in the Late Mesolithic. As the climate changed so did the landscape and vegetation, tundra and grassland on which herd animals, reindeer, horse and bison roamed, gave way to cold temperate forest and then to mixed deciduous woodland where red deer, roe deer, elk and wild boar grazed.

Mesolithic sites are concentrated in the south and east of Britain. Settlements in Scotland and the North expanded around 6000BC. The people were hunter-gatherers living off game and vegetation. The evidence of settlements is limited coming from for example, lithic scatters and middens. It indicates that people moved between upland, lowland and coastal camps on a seasonal basis to maximise the use of resources. The artefacts that have been found include flint and chert tools scrapers, blades and microliths, bone and antler harpoon points, mattocks and pins. These finds provide the main clues to life in the Mesolithic.

At some sites fine stake holes are found, were they made by tent pegs? On some sites areas appear to have been used for different functions including skin preparation, cooking, flint knapping and there are midden areas. Fresh water sources were nearby.

The Mesolithic, in Cumbria is considered to be from 5000BC-3500BC. The majority of Cumbrian late Paleolithic and Mesolithic sites have been found by the coast and include sites at Drigg, St Bees and Eskmeals, these are similar to those found on the

west coast of Scotland. Clusters of sites have been identified on the limestone areas around Barrow and on Orton Scar. Sites in Upper Weardale and Upper Teesdale were probably hunting camps for people of today's Yorkshire.

Mr Pierce concluded his talk by showing a series of slides of artefacts to demonstrate advances in technology over the period.

Continuing the prehistoric theme 14 members of the group were able to examine prehistoric artefacts under the guidance of the archaeology curator at the Tullie House museum in Carlisle on 26/2/99. Among the stone artefacts seen and handled were Langdale polished axes, flint arrow heads, beads and spindle whorls. Examples of pottery from burial sites from as early as 3000BC were admired. Bronze artefacts examined included parts of spearheads and a series of axes showing the developments in the technology. The afternoon concluded with a visit to the prehistory section of the museum.

ANGLO-SAXON CUMBRIA

Was there a monastery at Dacre?

On March 2nd the group enjoyed a very informative talk from Rachel Newman, Assistant Director, University of Lancaster Archaeology Unit, on recent excavations at Fremington and at Dacre church. It is difficult in this report to convey both the details given and the enthusiasm of the speaker.

She began by saying that very little is known of Cumbria in the period between the departure of the Romans in 410 and the Norman Conquest. Probably little changed, life going on as before with the settlements that had been used in the Iron Age and then in the Romano-British period continuing to be used. She explained that documentary sources give some information and outlined the history, before describing the excavations.

The power of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms changed over the centuries, Northumbria was the leading kingdom under Edwin and at its peak in the 7th. Cumbria was a borderland affected by powers from the north, south and east and in the 9th century from the west, from the Vikings. In 954 at the Battle of Stainmore Eric Blood Axe was killed bringing an end

to Scandinavian domination in Northumbria. Cumbria was probably part of Northumbria for a century around the 7th. There may have been periods of Cumbrian autonomy. By the 10th century Wessex predominated and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles record that in 926/927 Athelstane, King of Wessex, marched north to meet those in power at Eamont Bridge. Eamont Bridge as we know it was not an entity until Medieval times. Did the name refer to a river crossing or boundary?

The talk continued with a review of the references to religion. Edwin, King of Northumbria was converted to Christianity in the early 7th century. Bede writes that in 685 St Cuthbert travelled to Carlisle to dedicate a monastery, around the same time monasteries at Cartmel Heversham and Dacre are mentioned. Anglo-Saxon stone crosses found on the west coast and in the Eden Valley indicate the presence of religious establishments. By Scandinavian times the parish system was beginning.

Miss Newman then described the recent excavations at Fremington and at Dacre, showing slides of the sites and of the artefacts found.

Fremington.

Prior to the laying of a Shell pipeline there were archaeological surveys and excavations in the vicinity of the Romano-British sites around Brougham. An Anglo-Saxon site was discovered at Fremington. Initially a pit was found containing hand made pottery suggesting a prehistoric site. This find led to a more extensive excavation which revealed rectangular buildings and grubenhauser, hollows in the ground which would have had a simple super structure with possibly a suspended floor. These are the only sunken feature buildings in the north and are typically Anglo-Saxon. The pottery found was in the Bronze Age tradition, but may have been made in 7-8th century as evidence of a kiln was found.

Dacre

Bede mentions a miracle at a monastery at Dacre but the location is not given. There were two Dacres in the Kingdom of Northumbria, one near Patley Bridge which has no features to suggest an ecclesiastical site whereas at Dacre near Pooley Bridge there is a Medieval church with earth works running into the churchyard and evidence of a curving boundary

indicative of an early churchyard, possibly Celtic. Objects that can be seen at the church include the four Dacre Bears, a stone sculpture with beautiful complex carving of about 800 and the 10th century Dacre Cross. Earlier excavation of what was said to be a tunnel from the church to the Peel Tower found a drain, was this a monastery drain?

Excavation from 1981 onwards were instigated because of a house extension but little archaeology was found in the immediate area and a wider area was examined by geo- physics and excavated. The earliest features were signs of a ditch, wattle fence and post holes. The drain was looked at again and it was thought that the stones are re-worked Roman stones. A large cemetery with burials in Christian orientation was excavated, no humans remains were found except for the enamel shells from teeth; most burials were of adults. The cemetery must have been de-consecrated by the 13th century as the burials lie outside the Medieval churchyard. 9-10th century coffin nails and locks were found. Many of the finds indicated a high status site. These included fragments of window glass, pre-Norman coins and metal artefacts such as a 6-7th century belt buckle, an 8th or 9th century gold ring and a copper escutcheon. The metal work is of a high quality and forms the largest collection of pre-Norman metal work in the north west.

The talk concluded with a resume of the evidence to suggest that the site was monastic. The audience was left to decide! A strong indicator was perhaps the finding of a post-Roman stylus which would have been used for scratching on to wax. Writing and literacy in the Dark Ages were the preserve of churchmen and an ecclesiastical prerogative.

Phyllis H Rouston

Appleby Archaeology Logo



Are you happy with this logo?
If anyone has an idea for a new logo for the
group we would like to hear from you.
What do you think?

RESEARCH

This summer sees the launch of Appleby Archaeology Group's own research into the archaeology of the area. We will begin with a survey of a possible prehistoric boundary associated with an Iron Age settlement (visited by members of the group last year). This will provide the opportunity to get outside and try some techniques of archaeological field work. It is expected that the project will be carried out over the occasional weekend, afternoon or evenings depending on the time available to members. No previous experience is necessary in order to take part. Above all the project is intended to be an enjoyable experience as well as providing new information about the archaeology of the area.

We are now looking for volunteers to join the project!

If you feel you would like to take part, please complete the slip below providing information about when you might be available.

Return it to Martin at the address below.

RESEARCH TEAM

Name(s).....

Telephone

Please indicate when you could be available:

(please tick)

Sundays Saturdays

Mon Tues Wed Thu Fri

Daytime:

Do you have any particular skills or experience in archaeology?

Do you have access to any tools or equipment that might help the group?

SUMMER EVENTS

Investigating Prehistoric Henges Wed 2nd June

An evening session exploring these enigmatic monuments led by Martin Railton.

What is a henge? We will be looking at the archaeological evidence both old and new for two of these monuments. This is also a 'taster session' for the archaeology night class. There will be a small charge (£1) towards group funds.

Meet 7.00pm at King Arthurs Round Table, Eamont Bridge, Penrith (NY 52332838)

Investigating Stone Circles Wed 30th June

A session exploring Long Meg and Her Daughters. We will be looking at the stones and discussing what they can tell us about prehistoric activities at this site. Again there will be a small charge of £1 towards group funds. Led by Martin Railton

Meet by the circle at 7.00pm. The site is sign posted from the village of Little Salkeld (NY 570 372)

Archaeology Walks

Bronze Age Cairns on Askham Fell Sun 18th July

Explore the Bronze Age landscape and some impressive funerary monuments above Ullswater. Meet at 2.00pm outside the Punchbowl (public house) in Askham village.

If any one has an idea for a local walk or field trip (or would like to lead one!) then please contact Martin. More walks are to be planned for August.

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